

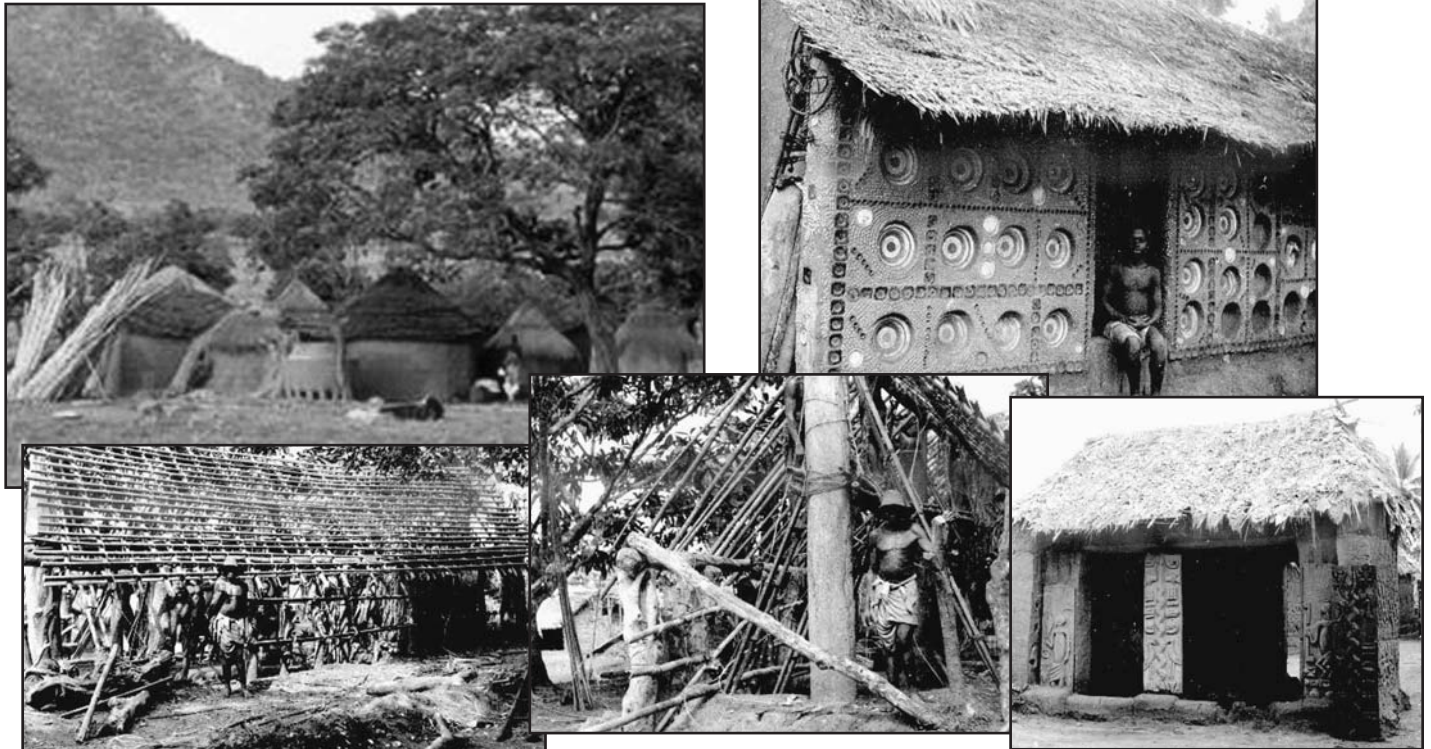


AMERICAN FRONTIER CULTURE FOUNDATION

Bringing the Past to Life

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Planning the West African Exhibit



The development the Museum's 2002 Master Site Plan provided an opportunity to rethink our mission in the light of new research on the times and cultures we represent with our outdoor exhibits and programs, and especially on the meaning of "frontier culture." One of the most interesting and thought provoking results of this rethinking was the decision to include a West African exhibit in the Plan to complement our existing "Old World" exhibits.

SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

This decision to include a West African exhibit in the Museum's Master Site Plan was based on solid historical evidence on the role of Africans and African-Americans in the settlement and development of the colonial frontier, and particularly of the Valley of Virginia.

Although it is uncertain when the first people of African origin arrived west of the Blue Ridge Mountains, by 1755, 20 years after the first settlements in the region, 760 appeared on the tithable lists for the counties of Augusta and Frederick, with 680 of them living in Frederick County. The great majority of early Africans and African-American settlers were enslaved, a fact that would remain constant for the next century. However, there would always be a small number of free African-Americans living in the region, and among the region's early settlers there was at least one known free African-American, named Edward Tarr, who was from Lancaster County, Pennsylvania and able to read and speak some German, buy land in Augusta County, and earn his living as a blacksmith.

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In Loving Memory

The Museum family mourns the recent passing of two beloved friends who, though their dedication and tireless efforts, made everlasting impressions upon our lives.

Mrs. Betty Sams Christian, Director, American Frontier Culture Foundation (1995-2002)

Mr. William B. Rowland, Jr., Trustee, Frontier Culture Museum (2003-2006)

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During the next century the African and African-American population of the Valley increased rapidly along with the growth of slavery, though the number of African born people in Virginia generally began to decline after the American Revolution. By the second federal census in 1800, the number of enslaved people in the Valley had risen to 16,012 in a total population of 102,026. Their numbers would continue to rise to a peak of 30,778 in 1850 when they formed 20% of the region's total population of 154,287 people.

Many who read these figures will not be surprised that there were enslaved Africans and African-Americans on the Virginia frontier, or that slavery was practiced in the Valley. We are, after all, discussing Virginia, the English mainland colony where Africans were first imported, the colony that would become the state with the largest population of slaves and slave-owners in the United States. Yet, the presence of Africans and African-Americans on the frontier and the practice of slavery in the region have rarely been included in histories of the frontier or of the Valley of Virginia, and it is an historical fact that seems at odds with the ideals of freedom, equality of opportunity, and self-reliance that are thought to characterize frontier culture.

ADVANCING OUR MISSION

The Museum, as a publicly supported educational institution and one that strives to be historically honest in the information we present to the public, cannot ignore the facts of Virginia or the frontier's past. Arguably, the Museum is obligated to actively explore the questions raised by the presence of Africans and African-Americans on Virginia's colonial frontier and their contribution to the creation of frontier culture, and to share the outcome of our explorations through our educational and interpretative programs. The Museum began presenting African-American history programs on its 1850s American Farm in the late 1990s. The emphasis of these programs is on slavery in the Valley in the mid-1800s and on how the practice of slavery here differed from practices in eastern Virginia or other southern states.

While this approach is well-meaning, a museum that features outdoor exhibits and programs that explore the Old World origins of the people who settled and developed Virginia's far western colonial frontier as well as the new culture they created on that frontier should do more. The Museum uses examples of traditional architecture and landscapes to show how German, Ulster Scots, and English immigrants and settlers lived in their homelands and the cultural characteristics they brought to the American colonies. If we have determined that Africans and African-Americans formed an important part of the colonial frontier population, should we not also feature buildings and landscapes from Africa as well, and should these buildings and landscapes not also be used to present programs that increase the public's knowledge of the cultural characteristics Africans brought to the American colonies?

That is the question the Museum asked itself in 2002. Given the mission of the Museum, the answer was obvious. Since that time, Museum Deputy Director Eric Bryan has been engaged in an effort to learn more about the African origins of the captives brought to colonial Virginia and to determine how these origins can be best represented at an outdoor, living-history museum. The project has proceeded along two parallel tracks: one deals with the architectural and landscaping aspects of the exhibit, while the other is focused on developing a

narrative from which to develop educational and interpretative programs.

RESEARCH & DISCOVERY PHASE

The key, initial question that needed to be answered in order to give the project focus is which African ethnic group the Museum should represent. Colonial shipping records compiled and analyzed by scholars reveal that Africans brought to Virginia came from a number of areas on the West African coast and hinterlands, and a comparatively small number also came from Madagascar. This vast area is also occupied by a large number of different groups with different languages and cultural practices.

To assist in making this determination, Museum staff sought the advice of Dr. John M. Vlach of The George Washington University, a prominent folklorist and anthropologist who writes extensively on the everyday architecture and material culture of the African Diaspora, and who has much experience working with museums and historic sites. Based on his knowledge of African-American archaeology and vernacular architecture in Virginia, Dr. Vlach strongly advised that the project focus on the Igbo, a large West African ethnic group that lives in southeastern Nigeria.

This advice is confirmed by recent scholarship on the African origins of the enslaved population in colonial Virginia. These studies affirm the diverse origins of this population, but they have also determined that among the various groups represented, the Igbo were especially numerous among the Africans brought to Virginia during the second quarter of the 1700s, a point in time when tobacco cultivation and slavery were expanding into the upper-Tidewater and Piedmont regions, and the settlement of the Valley of Virginia was beginning.

Since selecting the Igbo as the ethnic group to be represented at the Museum's African exhibit, Museum staff has focused its research and planning on the Igbo people and their heritage. In 2004, an advisory panel was formed comprised of Dr. Vlach; Dr. Johnston Njoku of Western Kentucky University, an Igbo and folklorist whose current research is focused on oral histories of the slave trade in the Nigerian hinterlands; Dr. Ugo Nwokeji of the University of California at Berkeley, who is also an Igbo and an historian who specializes in the transatlantic slave trade; Dr. Douglas Chambers of the University of Southern Mississippi, an historian and specialist in the history of the Igbo in Virginia; and Dr. Rachel Malcolm-Woods, an art historian specializing in African art and the art of the African Diaspora.

As the research and discovery phase of the project has unfolded, it has emerged that the Igbo are a well-documented people. They figure to some extent in some of the earliest accounts by European explorers and traders of the peoples on the west coast of Africa. One of the earliest detailed accounts of their way-of-life dates to the late 1700s and was provided by an Igbo named Olaudah Equiano, who was kidnapped as a young boy and sold into slavery. Equiano's true origins and account of his life has recently been called into question; however, generations of historians and ethnographers have studied his account of his boyhood in Africa and have found his descriptions to be mostly accurate.

Much of what is known of the distant Igbo past has been collected from oral histories created and maintained over a period of generations. The

part of Nigeria where the Igbo have lived for at least a thousand years was governed by Great Britain beginning in the early 1900s. During British administration, colonial officials and missionaries studied Igbo culture closely and compiled a great deal of information that is of tremendous value. The Igbo themselves have also produced a number of historians and anthropologists in recent decades, and they have added greatly to our understanding of the Igbo past. Among these are two extremely comprehensive, detailed studies of traditional Igbo architecture and landscapes, including photographs and measured drawings, as well as detailed notes on building materials and techniques.

PROJECT SUPPORT

In its work on this project thus far, the Museum has received tremendous moral and financial support from the American Frontier Culture Foundation, Inc. In June 2005, it also received additional financial support for exhibit and program planning from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities. The Museum intends to use this support for further consultation with its advisory panel and with other experts in particular aspects of African and African-American history and culture.

WORK UNDERWAY

On March 10, 2006, Museum Deputy Director Eric Bryan, Curator of Historic Buildings and Interpretive Supervisor Ray Wright, and Dr. Johnston Njoku of Western Kentucky University departed for a three-week exploratory trip in Nigeria to meet with Igbo historians and museum professionals, and to perform a preliminary survey of Igboland's historical and cultural resources. Mrs. Umebe Onyejekwe of the Nigerian National Commission for Museums and Monuments provided invaluable assistance in planning for this trip. She also served as their guide and local advisor for the duration of the trip.

In advance of this trip to Nigeria the Museum dedicated its winter lecture series to issues related to the development of a West African exhibit. In the first installment, Deputy Director Eric Bryan introduced the research behind the exhibit's development. Dr. Ugo Nwokeji of the University of California at Berkeley provided the

second lecture in this series, discussing gender issues in Atlantic Africa during the age of the slave trade. In the final lecture Dr. John Vlach of The George Washington University discussed the architectural traditions and material culture of Africa.

Mr. Bryan, Mr. Wright, and Dr. Njoku recently returned from a very successful trip to Nigeria. They are presently assembling their findings and planning the next steps in the development of the West African exhibit. Some of those steps are already known, such as moving the Museum's American Farm and preparing that site for the new exhibit. Other steps may include bringing Igbo builders to Virginia to assist in the construction of the buildings and structures that will comprise the West African exhibit.

The construction of the Museum's West African exhibit is projected to begin in 2007. When it is completed, Museum visitors will be treated to a new experience and a new perspective on the meaning of "frontier culture." It is also important to note that this exhibit will be the first of its kind in this country. Consequently, it will draw the attention of scholars nationwide and stimulate a great deal of discussion and study.

A ROLE FOR EVERYONE

The completion of the West African exhibit will be a moment to celebrate the contributions of many Museum staff, scholars from around the world, and the donors who supported this effort. The true success of this project will be measured by the impact it makes upon the lives of our community members, students across Virginia and beyond, teachers, scholars, and our patrons. The Museum needs you to help it achieve these goals by supporting this project through contributions to the Frontier Annual Fund or directly to the West African exhibit and by spreading news of this development far and wide.

There is much work yet to be done to complete the West African exhibit. With each major step we will share important developments with you. Thank you for your continued interest in the Frontier Culture Museum and the exciting developments associated with our Master Site Plan. 🌐

Museum Readies Bowman House for Visitors

During the winter season we took advantage of the typically quiet season at the Museum to make significant progress on our new exhibit, the Bowman House. Contributed to the Museum by Mr. & Mrs. Robert Y. Frazier of Harrisonburg, and further supported through their continued generosity, the Bowman House represents an important advancement of the Museum's mission to "increase public knowledge of the formation of a distinctive American folk culture from the synthesis of European, African, and indigenous peoples." The Bowman House is a superb example of the *synthesis* of rural German traditions and rising American architectural forms. Upon entering the Museum on George M. Cochran Parkway from Richmond Road you will catch a glimpse of the Bowman House as you look to your left. Although work continues on this new exhibit, and its access road from the parking lot, we strongly encourage you to inquire about touring the Bowman House when you arrive at our Visitors Center. 🌐





American Frontier Culture Foundation, Inc.

P. O. Box 629
Staunton, Virginia 24402-0629
(540) 332-7850
FAX (540) 332-9989
www.frontier.virginia.gov

Non-Profit Organization
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Staunton, VA 24402

Frontier Culture Museum: Upcoming Events

Spring/Summer/Fall Hours (March 13-November 30): 9 a.m. - 5 p.m.
Complete calendar on-line at www.frontier.virginia.gov or call 540-332-7850

April 22: Earth Day Celebration

10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.: Family nature walks
(1 hour, 1 mile) conducted at 10:00 a.m. and
1:00 p.m. General admission.

April 26-30: Fiber Fest

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. daily: From sheep shearing to
linen weaving, learn about wool and flax processing
on the Museum's historic farms. Plain sewing and
fancy needlework were important parts of women's
lives. Try your hand at these activities. Quilters,
bring your favorite needle and join our quilting
frolic on Sunday, April 30, 1:00 - 4:00 p.m. General
admission.

May 6 & 13: Girl Scout Days

9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

May 6: "Foodways in History" (Food preparation
and preservation in times past)

May 13: "Animals on the Farm" (Hands-on
activities on the farm sites)

Pre-registration required, limited space; special rate
for troops. Adult \$6 (13+), Child \$4 (5-12 yrs),
under 5 years old-free. One leader per troop free.

May 20: Bird Watching Basics

7:00 - 10:00 a.m.: Bird watching basics; 1 mile
walk. Free to public.

May 26-29: Historic Garden Weekend

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. daily: Enjoy the Museum's
beautiful gardens. Join our guided tours departing
the Visitors Center at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m.
daily, or enjoy a self-guided tour. General admission.

June 2: First Fridays

6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.: Museum admission free.
(Continues on the first Friday of each month
through September.)

June 10: Tree Walk

8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.: Identify local trees; 1 mile
walk. Free to public.

June 16-18: Historic Trades Weekend-Men at Work

9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m. daily: Cooper, Turner, Smith,
Weaver...long ago, these family names often
indicated a man's way of making a living. Visit the
museum's historic farms to see demonstrations of
various trades which provided useful items for farm
and household. General admission.

June 24: Music in the Backcountry and Old-Time Music Concert

3:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.: Workshop. Learn about
music in the 19th century Virginia backcountry. See
and hear traditional instruments and learn to sing
old songs of the period. Free to the public.
5:00 p.m. - 7:00 p.m.: Supper available. (Cost TBD)
7:00 p.m.: Old-time music concert. Admission \$5.

July 3-7 & 10-14: Summer on the Farms

9:00 a.m. - 12:00 p.m. daily: Children ages 4-8
enjoy summer fun on the farms and in the education
classroom. Pre-registration required. \$45/week.
Members discount.

July 4: 4th of July Celebration on the American Farm

11:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.: Enjoy games and contests,

hear Declaration of Independence at noon.
General admission.

July 15: American Farm Barn Dance and Dinner

6:30 p.m. - 9:00 p.m.: Old-time supper,
followed by dancing in historic 1850's barn.
Advanced reservations required. \$18 adult
(13+), \$12 child. Member discount.

July 24-28 & July 31-August 4: Summer Day Camp

9:00 a.m. - 3:00 p.m. daily: Children ages 9-12
enjoy summer fun. Pre-registration required.
\$75/week. Member discount. Call the Museum
for more information.

Plan your next Special Event at the Frontier Culture Museum

Look no further than the Frontier Culture
Museum for your next special event. A
memorable setting, easy access and plenty of
parking make this the ideal location to host a
corporate function, wedding, family reunion, or
other special occasion. Our facilities are
available during the Spring, Summer, and Fall.
For more information, or to reserve Museum
facilities for your next event, please contact
Linda Bowers at 540-332-7850, ext. 172.